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**Abstract** (Document Summary)

But no matter how they get there, millions of homeowners are turning to the World Wide Web for referrals and how-to tips amid a nationwide remodeling/renovating boom.

One of the hottest sites is [ImproveNet](#) ([www.improvenet.com](http://www.improvenet.com)), which has built a national database of more than 630,000 contractors, architects and designers.

Consumers submit project descriptions and [ImproveNet](#) matches those descriptions with local contractors.

**Full Text** (344 words)*Copyright USA Today Information Network Apr 13, 1999*

See also related Cover Story on 1B.

Some people think of the Internet right away when they get ready to renovate or remodel.

Others come to it only after trying unsuccessfully for days or weeks to reach overwhelmed and overworked contractors and architects.


But no matter how they get there, millions of homeowners are turning to the World Wide Web for referrals and how-to tips amid a nationwide remodeling/renovating boom.


One of the hottest sites is [ImproveNet](#) ([www.improvenet.com](http://www.improvenet.com)), which has built a national database of more than

630,000 contractors, architects and designers.

Consumers submit project descriptions and  ImproveNet matches those descriptions with local contractors. ✓

To be included in the database, individuals or firms must have been in business at least three years and have a clean credit and legal record.

Contractors must pay \$6 for each job that they bid. "We used to let them do it for free, but then we found they would bid on every job but not pursue the job," says Hunter Madsen,  ImproveNet's senior vice president of marketing.

If a contractor gets the job, he must also pay  ImproveNet a half-percentage point of the cost of the job and is prohibited from including the fee in the bill, Madsen says.

Consumers get at least four referrals for each project. Marlene Cook, a realtor in Cedar Knolls, N.J., recently used the service. She says all four contractors came out to look at the job -- redoing two bathrooms for about \$20,000.

"Two never called me back and one estimate was outrageous, absolutely outrageous," Cook says.

But the fourth contractor gave a reasonable estimate, and she hired him. He's set to finish the job this week, and Cook says she would use him again.

Mary Curry, a housewife in Woodinville, Wash., also used the service for a \$150,000 redo: "You name it, we redid it," Curry says. ✓

She turned to the Internet after five unsuccessful attempts to schedule appointments with contractors.

"We selected one of the three guys who came out, and so far, we like what they're doing," Curry says.

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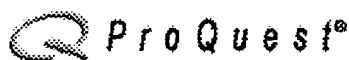
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Section: E;TODAY'S HOME;HOMETECH  
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**Abstract** (Document Summary)

[ImproveNet](#) ([www.improvenet.com](http://www.improvenet.com)) hopes to change that scenario by giving homeowners - who spend more than \$180 billion a year on improvements - a free resource where they can find qualified professionals in their area.

The process is fairly simple. The homeowner provides some basic information, including a text description of the project, approximate square footage of the space involved and an estimated budget. [ImproveNet](#) compares that information with its list of more than 600,000 pre-screened contractors, designers and architects.

For each company recommended by [ImproveNet](#), the homeowner receives a screening report saying the firm has been approved as a quality candidate. For homeowners who want even more information about a company, [ImproveNet](#) will provide a comprehensive credit and legal- history report for \$29. For an additional \$35, [ImproveNet](#) will review any agreements before they are signed, pointing out areas of potential problems.

**Full Text** (735 words)*Copyright Washington Times Library Mar 11, 1999*

Hiring professional help for home improvements can be a frightening prospect for homeowners. Stories abound about contractors who do unsatisfactory work, walk off the job or just take the money, never showing up to complete a project - often leaving folks in the lurch without much recourse.

[ImproveNet](#) ([www.improvenet.com](http://www.improvenet.com)) hopes to change that scenario by giving homeowners - who spend more than \$180 billion a year on improvements - a free resource where they can find qualified professionals in their area.

The process is fairly simple. The homeowner provides some basic information, including a text description of the project, approximate square footage of the space involved and an estimated budget. [ImproveNet](#) compares that information with its list of more than 600,000 pre-screened contractors, designers and architects.

These professionals have passed a test evaluating each company on criteria such as credit history, license status, insurance and legal judgments involving the firm.

If the professionals identified by [ImproveNet](#) are interested in being considered for a particular job, their names, e-mail addresses and phone numbers are sent to the inquiring homeowner.

Contractors pay a fee of \$6 for each lead they receive from [ImproveNet](#) and, when granted a contract, they pay an additional finder's fee.

For each company recommended by [ImproveNet](#), the homeowner receives a screening report saying the firm has been approved as a quality candidate. For homeowners who want even more information about a company, [ImproveNet](#) will provide a comprehensive credit and legal- history report for \$29. For an additional \$35, [ImproveNet](#) will review any agreements before they are signed, pointing out areas of potential problems.

If a homeowner is considering working with a contractor not listed with the Web site, [ImproveNet](#) still can help. The company not only will provide a credit report on an individual or corporate home- improvement service, but also will determine whether there are any unresolved legal judgments against the company.

It takes three to five business days after submission of a simple on-line form to obtain additional information on [ImproveNet](#) listings and to get information on firms not listed with [ImproveNet](#).

It is important for [ImproveNet](#) users to remember that the Web site is a referral service to help homeowners choose contractors, and [ImproveNet](#) does not guarantee the work of recommended contractors.

In addition to helping homeowners find professionals, the site is packed with home-improvement ideas, on-line product catalogs and a design gallery filled with decorating ideas and solutions for inside and outside the home.

Regularly updated Feature Projects provide unique design and decorating solutions, offering the name of the designer and manufacturers of items used in the space.

While browsing through the more than 25,000 photos and 20,000 pages of text, the viewer can capture ideas and pictures, adding them to a personal project folder.

There are products from more than 30 categories, featuring hundreds of manufacturers on the site. A manufacturers list shows the names, addresses, phone numbers and e-mail addresses of manufacturers of products from cabinets to windows.

If the viewer still can't find a product or the solution to projects from fixing a leaky faucet to how to remove varnish from an antique table, My Job Coach contains a message board where users can post questions and get advice from [ImproveNet](#) experts.

The message board also can be a helpful place to ask questions in the middle of projects or if the homeowner isn't satisfied with a contractor's response to a problem.

Some sound advice, such as the admonition to review home insurance before beginning projects, can be found in the Project Planning section. Users will find information on preparing to tackle an improvement, including getting organized; a list of books and other reading material; tips for completing the design phase; and more ideas about hiring a contractor.

A few pages of very interesting reading, Known Home Improvement Scams, provide a list of 29 popular rip-offs categorized by the state in which they were first reported.

For example, in one scam reported in Prince George's County, consumers are told they have won a free home-security system. In reality, they are signing up for a lengthy and expensive monthly contract.

A final service of the site is the Quicken Home & Mortgage page, which helps homeowners borrow money for that

big improvement project. Users can pre-qualify themselves for a loan, shop and compare loans from lenders, and apply on line.

**[Illustration]**

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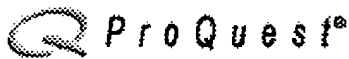
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Column Name: HOUSE SENSE  
Section: SUNDAY HOMELIFE  
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**Abstract** (Document Summary)

Now the Internet and ①ImproveNet.com may have a new method. ①ImproveNet promises to find you a good, competent contractor via the Internet - at no cost to you. (Or call the company in Redwood City, Calif., at (800) 437-0473.)

Let's start at the beginning: An ①ImproveNet founder once had managed large construction projects, hiring architects and contractors. You'll be interested to know that even professionals have problems with contractors, but this fellow decided to do something about it, said Bill Crosby, an ①ImproveNet vice president.

After you log in with ①ImproveNet, you're asked about your project (kitchen remodeling, room addition, etc.), what you estimate the cost to be and when you want to get started. ①ImproveNet submits your job description (but not your name) to local contractors. Those who are interested in the project (as many as four) pay \$6 each to ①ImproveNet.

**Full Text** (571 words)*Copyright Chicago Sun Times May 2, 1999*

'Tis spring, and a homeowner's fancy turns to . . . well, fixin' things up. The politically correct term is "home improvement." Some 36 percent of homeowners plan an improvement project this year, according to the American Express Retail Index, and they'll spend an average of \$2,747. (See charts.)

Thus the problem surfaces: Where do you get a good contractor? You can throw the dice and use the Yellow Pages, or you can go by word- of-mouth and ask among your neighbors.

Now the Internet and ImproveNet.com may have a new method. ①ImproveNet promises to find you a good, competent contractor via the Internet - at no cost to you. (Or call the company in Redwood City, Calif., at (800) 437-

0473.)

Let's start at the beginning: An [ImproveNet](#) founder once had managed large construction projects, hiring architects and contractors. You'll be interested to know that even professionals have problems with contractors, but this fellow decided to do something about it, said Bill Crosby, an [ImproveNet](#) vice president.

It took one year and \$1 million to build up a database of more than 600,000 contractors across the nation, using every name available from the Yellow Pages, licensing boards and trade groups.

[ImproveNet](#) then ran credit checks, putting each contractor through a process similar to one an individual experiences when applying for a mortgage. Did they pay their bills on time, or at all? If a contractor had stiffed a subcontractor or a lumberyard, it would show up on the credit record, Crosby said.

✓ Those with poor credit records are not used. Neither are those who failed the legal screening and had too many suits against them. (Almost every contractor is involved in a suit or two, but a whole string of suits tells a different story.) The service also gets license and insurance information on contractors.

After you log in with [ImproveNet](#), you're asked about your project (kitchen remodeling, room addition, etc.), what you estimate the cost to be and when you want to get started. [ImproveNet](#) submits your job description (but not your name) to local contractors. Those who are interested in the project (as many as four) pay \$6 each to [ImproveNet](#).

You then talk to as many of the four as you want and check their references, Crosby said. If you choose one, the contractor pays [ImproveNet](#) \$95 to \$450 based on the size of your original cost estimate. Homeowners pay nothing, Crosby said.

Don't be surprised, however, if contractor bids are higher than your estimate, as homeowners typically underestimate job costs.

During and after the project, homeowners are queried as to the contractor's performance. Nearly 90 percent of customers report they're very happy or extremely happy with the work, Crosby said. Since [ImproveNet](#) started in August 1997, it's matched 35,000 homeowners with contractors for \$1.4 billion worth of work and gotten only four telephoned complaints, he said. [ImproveNet](#) intervened, and in each case the contractor satisfied the complaint, Crosby said.

Repeated complaints would see the contractor scratched from the list.

[ImproveNet](#) offers numerous other services to homeowners, including running credit and legal checks on a contractor you've already chosen (this will cost you \$29).

Am I saying [ImproveNet](#) is the way of the future? No. Have I used [ImproveNet](#)? No. But judging by the number of telephone complaints I get about contractors selected via the old methods, it's certainly worth looking into. You've got nothing to lose.

[Illustration]  
GRAPHS; See roll microfilm.

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Author(s): ☐ Bill Rumbler

Language: ☐ English

Publication title: ☐ Chicago Sun - Times

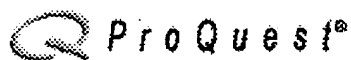
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*Business Editors. Business Wire. New York: Jul 29, 1998. p. 1* [Full text](#) [Abstract](#)

- ☐ 35. [Owning. Matchmakers: A new service called ImproveNet; \[NORTH SPORTS FINAL, C Edition\]](#)

*Chicago Tribune. Chicago, Ill.: Jun 19, 1998. p. 3* [Full text](#) [Citation](#)

- ☐ 36. [ImproveNet Creates New Nationwide Home Improvement e-Market Service](#)

*Business Editors. Business Wire. New York: Jun 2, 1998. p. 1* [Full text](#) [Abstract](#)

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*Anonymous. FamilyPC. Northampton: Jun 1998. Vol. 5, Iss. 6; p. 127 (2 pages)* [Abstract](#)

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*Business Editors/Home Improvement Writers. Business Wire. New York: Feb 4, 1998. p. 1*  
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*John D Wagner. Today's Homeowner. Dec 1997/Jan 1998. Vol. 93, Iss. 821; p. 17 (1 page)*  
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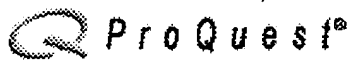
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